

A newsletter about the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System

### **ABOUT US:**

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium is composed of 17 states and additional partner agencies. The DLM Consortium is committed to developing a computer-based assessment for K–12 public school students with significant cognitive disabilities. General state assessments, even with accommodations, are not appropriate for these students, who compose approximately 1% of students in this grade range.

The DLM Consortium is led by the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation at the University of Kansas, and is funded through a five-year grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The assessment will be implemented during the 2014–2015 school year.

The DLM Consortium is one of two multistate consortia to receive federal grants to create a next generation alternate assessment linked to the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts for the 1% population. DLM member states are involved during every phase of assessment development.

The DIM Consortium announces membership of Alaska, Illinois, and North Dakota

#### **DLM Consortium States**

Alaska • Illinois • Iowa • Kansas Michigan • Mississippi • Missouri New Jersey • North Carolina North Dakota • Oklahoma • Utah Vermont • Virginia • Washington West Virginia • Wisconsin



## BUILDING ON WHAT EDUCATORS KNOW ABOUT THEIR STUDENTS

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System (DLM) is a comprehensive system that supports student learning and measures what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do. The system is designed to individualize learning experiences for each student by presenting questions and tasks that are appropriate for a student's cognitive and sensory abilities.

DLM rests on the premise that educators who have engaged with a student academically know a great deal about the student's characteristics, accessibility needs, and broad academic abilities. These educators are considered a good source of information to guide initial structuring of students' unique learning experiences.

First Contact is a survey instrument that was administered to educators of students who have participated in the alternate assessments in our member states and served to improve the DLM developers' understanding of students' unique learning and assessment access needs. To collect this information, educators with firsthand knowledge of a student with significant cognitive disabilities answered approximately 65 relevant questions. These educators classified the student's sensory capabilities and use of assistive devices, as well as the student's current achievements in communications, reading, mathematics, writing, and general understanding of instruction.

When implemented, DLM will rely on educators' classifications and ratings of individual students to initially specify where in the learning maps to begin assessing each student. As a dynamic system, DLM will then objectively adjust the next set of questions or tasks based on a combination of the student's mastery of nodes on the learning map and their personal needs and preferences profile. This approach will provide a clearer picture of what a student knows and can do compared with traditional systems that use a predetermined set of items or adapt the next set of items based on level of difficulty.

## WHO PARTICIPATES IN ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS?

The First Contact survey results described the student population that is likely to participate in DLM learning and assessment. The majority of students in the sample were classified as a student with an intellectual disability (44%), with autism (23%), or with multiple disabilities (14%).

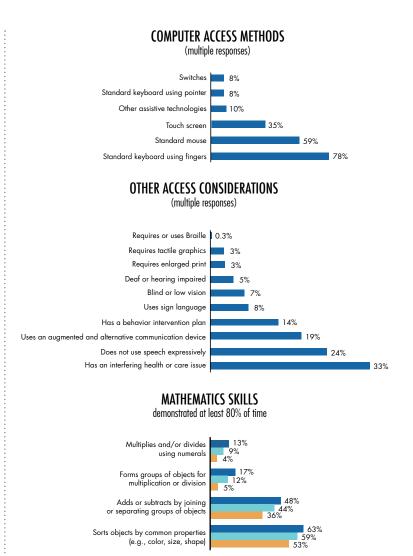
Most students were able to access the computer through a conventional tool, such as a standard keyboard, mouse, or touch screen. Only 4% of students had not had the opportunity to access a computer. However, students had a variety of other access needs that the DLM must consider.

The majority of students could read some words. Approximately 9% of students were rated as reading above the third-grade level. Many of the students could perform very simple mathematical tasks at least 80% of the time.

# FIRST CONTACT CENSUS SURVEY RELIABILITY STUDY

To ensure the validity of information obtained through the First Contact survey, the DLM team conducted a reliability pilot study based on the classifications and ratings of 299 students. For each student, two educators who had direct knowledge of the student's characteristics and abilities completed the survey.

"The results of the reliability study suggested acceptable rater consistency," DLM research associate Amanda Ferster said.



The charts presented here are based on valid ratings of 44,782 students currently participating in an Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards during the 2012–2013 academic year in 14 DLM consortium member states.

Middle School

High School

"It also paved the way for us to implement action steps to improve survey administration and item clarity."

The first action step was getting consortium states to agree to have students' primary educators, rather than other school staff, provide student classifications and ratings. Second, the DLM team improved the clarity of survey items and created administrative resources to help educators more accurately complete the survey. Finally, the states' experiences with and discussions about the survey process led to an important DLM system shift. Educators will now complete the survey from within the DLM integrated test engine. Furthermore, educators will have the opportunity to update and verify their responses before their students enter into the dynamic learning process.

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